

Facts About Child Abuse and Neglect

What is child abuse or neglect?

Under Virginia law, an abused or neglected child is any child under 18 whose parent, or any other person responsible for the care of the child, does any or all of the following:

- ◆ causes, or threatens to cause, a physical or mental injury except for an accident.
- ◆ fails to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care or caring support.
- ◆ abandons the child.
- ◆ fails to provide the kind of supervision necessary for a child's age or level of development.
- ◆ commits, or allows to be committed, any illegal sexual act involving the child -- including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution -- or allows the child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.

Child abuse is not usually just one physical attack or just one instance of failure to meet a child's most basic needs. Usually child abuse is a pattern of behavior which takes place over a period of time. The longer child abuse continues, the more serious it becomes, and the more difficult it is to stop.

How many children are we talking about?

- ◆ In fiscal year 2001, **8,993** of Virginia's children were involved in founded cases of child abuse and/or neglect. **Every 58 minutes** a Virginia child is abused or neglected.
- ◆ In fiscal year 2001, **thirty-one** children died from injuries attributable to child abuse and neglect. Twenty-five of the children (81%) were age three or under. **Every 12 days** a Virginia child dies from abuse or neglect.
- ◆ Nationwide, **879,000** children were victims in confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in 2000. **Every 35 seconds** a U.S. child is abused or neglected.
- ◆ During the same period, **1,200** U.S. children died as a result of child abuse and neglect, one **every 7 hours**. Children younger than one year old accounted for 44 percent of child fatalities and 85 percent of child fatalities were younger than six years of age.

Who are the abusers?

- ◆ Abusive parents can be your friends, your neighbors or your relatives. Child maltreatment affects all economic, racial, social, ethnic and religious groups.

What is the cost of child abuse and neglect in monetary and human terms?

- ◆ The cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States is estimated at **\$258 million per day**, according to a study by Prevent Child Abuse America.
- ◆ Abused and neglected children are less likely to be school-ready and more likely to exhibit behavior disorders, to become teen parents, to abuse alcohol and drugs and to enter the juvenile justice system. As a result, these children need a broad range of services – from medical and mental health care to special education and law enforcement. These are the costs considered in the study.

How can child abuse and neglect be prevented?

A child may be helpless, but you are not. Here are the five "R's" of preventing child abuse and neglect:

- ◆ **Remember** the risk factors. Family stress can lead to abuse or neglect.
- ◆ **Recognize** the warning signs. Children's behavior may signal that something is wrong.
- ◆ **Report** suspected abuse or neglect. Call the local department of social services or the Virginia Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline – 1-800-552-7096.
- ◆ **Raise the issue**. Educate yourself and others about child abuse and neglect.
- ◆ **Reach out**. Anything you do to support families can help to reduce stress.